DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 372 069 SP 035 361

AUTHOR Suarez, Tanya M.; And Others
TITLE Autonomous Teacher Professional Standards Boards. Policy Brief.
INSTITUTION North Carolina Educational Policy Research Center, Chapel Hill.
PUB DATE Jun 94
NOTE 5p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Advisory Committees; *Board of Education Role; *Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Governance; Government Role; Higher Education; *Institutional Autonomy; Policy Formation; State Boards of Education; *State Standards; *Teacher Certification
IDENTIFIERS *North Carolina

ABSTRACT

Eleven states have established autonomous professional standards boards responsible for teacher licensure. Supporters of these boards feel that they create higher standards than state boards of education do, are better able to address complex issues related to teachers and teaching, and are an important statewide component in the nationwide effort to raise teaching standards. Those opposed to such boards cite fragmentation of governance regarding teaching and instruction and the state's responsibility to set standards because teachers are public servants. North Carolina has established the Professional Practices Commission, which serves in an advisory capacity to the State Board of Education. However, members believe that the Commission's work is not addressed adequately by the state, leaving them with little power and influence. Issues include the professionalization of teaching, constitutionality of autonomous boards, governance, coordination with other state policies and programs, and cost. Three types of policy options that North Carolina might consider with regard to setting standards and licensing teachers include: maintaining and existing structure, strengthening the current structure, and creating an autonomous teacher standards and licensing board. Advantages and disadvantages of each option are outlined. (JDD)

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NORTH CAROLINA EDUCATIONAL POLICY RESEARCH CENTER

POLICY BRIEF

ED 372 069

AUTONOMOUS TEACHER PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS BOARDS

BY
TANYA M. SUAREZ
DEBORAH A. POLEN
NANCY C. GOTTOVI

JUNE, 1994

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SB353361

Among the education issues being debated in a number of states is the creation of autonomous boards whose responsibility is setting standards and granting licenses for teachers—a responsibility traditionally undertaken by the State Board of Education. Supporters of these boards emphasize the need to view teaching as a profession similar to that of law and medicine and the consequent need for the profession, rather than the state, to lead standard setting for entry into teaching. Further, they believe that an autonomous board would: (a) create higher standards and thus better teachers, (b) be better able to address important, complex issues related to teachers and teaching through their exclusive attention to the area, and (c) be an important statewide component in the nationwide effort to raise teaching standards through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

Those opposed to the creation of such boards most often cite the change in traditional state governance of education created by the transfer of responsibility for teacher standards and licensing from state boards and departments of education to an autonomous board. Issues of the constitutional and statutory responsibilities of the state regarding education emerge as states consider creating these boards. In addition to noting the potential fragmentation of governance regarding teaching and instruction, opponents question the wisdom of separation in governance as states attempt to design and achieve statewide, systemic reform. Some argue that, unlike physicians and attorneys, teachers are public servants and that standards and licensing should be a responsibility of the state. Finally, some opposition is based on the specific areas of responsibility given to the board, (e.g., teacher preparation program approval in colleges and universities), rather than on the overall concept.

TEACHER STANDARDS BOARDS IN OTHER STATES

Currently, there are eleven states which have established autonomous professional standards boards responsible for teacher licensure. Three states (California, Oregon, Minnesota) have had professional standards boards for some time having created them in the 1970's and early 1980's. The remaining states (Nevada, Iowa, Kentucky, Georgia, Indiana, Wyoming, North Dakota and West Virginia) created these boards more recently.

Most of the autonomous standards boards: (a) set standards for and license both teachers and administrators; (b) set standards and fees for licenses; (c) issue, renew, and revoke licenses; (d) monitor professional practices; and (e) approve teacher education programs. Their boards range in size from 9 to 18 members, and have as their most common

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Resources

American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education

American Federation of Teachers

American Federation of Teachers (North Carolina)

Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (North Carolina)

Columbia Teachers' College Faculty

Connecticut Advisory Council for Teacher Professional Standards

Indiana Policy Research Center

National Association of State Boards of Education

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

National Council of Accreditation for Teacher Education

National Education Association

North Carolina Association of Educators

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

North Carolina Legislative Research Division

North Carolina Professional Practices Commission

North Carolina State Board of Cosmetic Arts Examiners

North Carolina State Board of Education

North Carolina State Board of Medical Examiners

The Rand Corporation

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members teachers who comprise half or the majority of the board, school administrators, representatives of teacher education institutions, and local school board members. The organizations of the standards boards vary from that of a large state agency with a 14 million dollar budget, to a staff of two who use state education department staff and resources to carry out their work. Standards boards are funded by licensing fees in some states and by a combination of licensing fees and state funds in others.

Conflicts with regard to standards boards have most often occurred: (a) between the standards board and department of education in instances where the board was advisory rather than autonomous, and (b) between the standards boards and teacher preparation programs. In addition, at least two states (WV, VA) have experienced conflict over the constitutionality of such boards.

Three boards reported an increase in standards since their creation, two reported no changes, and the rest indicated that there had been insufficient time for changes to occur. Those reporting higher standards attributed these increases to the board's ability to concentrate exclusively on professional issues, the composition of the board providing broad expertise relative to teachers and teaching, and the board's capability to be responsive to reform initiatives and constituent needs.

Teacher Standards and Licensure in the Southeast

In the southeastern area including Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama and Mississippi, only one state (GA) has an autonomous teacher standards board. Such boards have been under serious consideration in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. Virginia passed the enabling legislation; however, it was vetoed by the Governor due to concerns about constitutionality. South Carolina has been considering the creation of a standards board since the 1970s but has not yet created one. Florida is conducting a program audit which will include recommendations for the most appropriate structure for teacher standards and licensing.

Teacher Standards in North Carolina

Currently, North Carolina has a standards and licensing commission serving in an *advisory* capacity to the State Board of Education. The Professional Practices Commission has the responsibility of advising the State Board of Education in the preparation and licensing of public school professional personnel. However, the state's experience with an advisory group rather than autonomous one has been similar to the experience of other states. Members believe that the Commission's work is not addressed adequately by the state, leaving them with little power and influence in matters for which the Commission was created.

Relevant Issues

The Professionalization of Teaching. In spite of the state's efforts to improve teaching standards through the efforts of the Joint Committee on Teacher Education, the Teacher Training Task Force, and the Professional Practices Commission, there still exists sentiment that more needs to be done to raise standards and recognize teachers as professionals.

The Constitution. North Carolina's constitution, like that of five of the states with autonomous teacher standards boards, assigns the responsibility for supervising and administering the public schools to the State Board of Education. As in at least two other states, the constitutionality of separating the establishment of standards for teachers and teacher licensing from the responsibilities of the State Board and Department of Public Instruction may be questioned.

Governance. Opponents of an autonomous teacher standards boards fear deleterious effects of fragmentation of the policy and rule making process that such boards may create for governance in general and statewide reform in particular. Supporters, however, believe the fragmentation and added emphasis on teacher standards and professionalism would be beneficial. Experience in other states gives little information regarding the effects of these boards, but does suggest that the issue of governance be addressed and resolved.

Coordination with Other State Policies and Programs. Two areas of responsibility often included in those of standards boards in other states but not in most of the bills proposed in North Carolina are: (a) **licensing of administrators and other educational personnel** and (b) **approval of teacher preparation programs**. If these responsibilities are not to be included as responsibilities of the teachers standards board, care must be taken to coordinate the work of those responsible for these areas and new board. Coordination would also be needed between the board and (a) those responsible for determining the state's **curriculum** to ensure that entering teachers are prepared to teach the Standard Course of Study; and (b) those responsible for **professional development** leading to license renewal. Finally, North Carolina, unlike other states with standards boards, has a **state salary scale** for teachers that requires coordination between licensing criteria and salary scales.

Cost. States have used many different configurations to organize and operate standards boards, some of which are significantly more costly than others. Any plan for a new board should be carefully analyzed for its costs to the state and/or candidates before final decisions are made.

Policy Options for North Carolina

Three types of policy options that North Carolina might consider with regard to setting standards and licensing teachers are contained in Figure 1.

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States Contacted

Alabama

California

Florida

Georgia

Indiana

Iowa

Kentucky

Minnesota

Mississippi

Nevada

North Carolina

North Dakota

Oregon

South Carolina

Virginia

Wyoming

Figure 1. Options for North Carolina Teacher Standards and Licensing

OPTIONS	PROS	CONS
1. Maintain the existing structure	◆ Avoids potential constitutionality conflict ◆ Maintains unity of governance regarding teaching and learning ◆ No additional costs other than normal increases in requests for licenses	◆ Does not address the problems of lack of power and influence expressed by the current Professional Practices Commission ◆ Does not address the issues of recognition of teachers as professionals
2. Strengthen the current structure		
a. Give the Professional Practices Commission the authority to make policy subject to State Board of Education veto	◆ Provides an increase in authority and potential impact for the Professional Practices Commission without removing ultimate decision-making authority from the State Board of Education ◆ Gives increased emphasis to teacher professionalism ◆ Provides for a broad scope of involvement by the Commission in the preparation and licensing of teachers and other public school professional personnel	◆ Decisions of the Commission could be overturned by the State Board of Education thereby decreasing the Commission's autonomy
b. Create a standards board similar to the one created for administrators.	◆ Provides an increase in authority in standard setting without removing ultimate decision-making authority for licensing from the State Board of Education	◆ Separates teacher standard setting from ultimate licensing decisions and the teacher preparation program approval process ◆ If the board chooses to develop its own exam rather than use existing ones such as ETS's new exam for teachers, PRAXIS, the scope of work and expense of the board will soar. ◆ Narrows the scope of work of the standards board
3. Create an autonomous teacher standards and licensing board	◆ Recognizes and addresses the professionalism of teachers in a more significant and visible way	◆ Fragments state-level educational governance ◆ Increases costs to state and/or teachers ◆ Creates potential constitutionality conflict

[1] The Professional Practices Commission currently advises the SBE in the preparation and licensing of public school professional personnel.

[2] The standards board of administrators (a) develops professional standards, (b) develops and implements an exam re the standards, and (c) provides the SBE with the names of those who pass the exam so that they may be licensed.